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Editor's Notebook

Carolyn C. Rogers begins this issue with a study of older women in poverty. Poverty affects 12 percent of Americans over the age of 60. It is a particular burden for women. With each advancing age group among the elderly, women make up an increasing majority of the population. Rogers found higher poverty rates for older women in rural areas compared with urban and a steady rise in poverty as rurality increases. This is a problem that could grow in significance as the elderly population doubles over the next 30 years.

Peter L. Stenberg examines a problem that has become more serious in recent years, the closure of military bases. Though more urban than rural bases have closed, rural economies are usually harder hit because they are smaller and less diverse. After closure, employment drops and the housing market and schools usually suffer, too. Communities have taken varied paths to recovery and have been helped by Federal aid and the good transportation infrastructure that characterizes bases. The author looks in depth at the diverse experiences of three communities.

Rail industry consolidations stemming from deregulation have improved efficiency but also have brought some negative consequences for rural America, such as abandonments and reduced competition. Dennis M. Brown's article discusses these problems and some of the strategies used to cope with them, including the growth of short-line railroads, the Rails-to-Trails movement, and the role that government can play.

H. Frederick Gale, Jr., explores the importance of export industries for rural areas. Using a special 1996 survey of manufacturers, Gale found that about half of nonmetro manufacturers export products. Natural resource-based industries, such as food, lumber, paper, and furniture, account for much of these exports, but industrial machinery, electrical equipment, and metal products are also important. Altogether, exports make up 10 percent of all nonmetro manufactured products and are strongest in the South Atlantic and East North Central regions.

Terry L. Besser examines the employment conditions of business enterprises in small Iowa towns. Despite low unemployment, earnings of Iowa nonfarm workers are about 18 percent below the U.S. average. In the smalltown businesses surveyed, most employees worked part-time and received fewer benefits. Over a quarter of the workers in these businesses were employed by firms with fewer than 10 employees. Development policies often overlook the smallest businesses.

In our Indicators piece, Jason P. Schachter, Leif Jensen, and Gretchen T. Cornwell look at the migration of the poor in Pennsylvania. There has been a trend in recent years for poor people to move from cities to nonmetro counties. The authors developed three indexes to measure the importance of poverty and education in this migration. They found that the poor who migrate to nonmetro areas move less for employment-related reasons than to find cheaper housing and to improve the quality of their lives. Overall, nonmetro areas in Pennsylvania are gaining the least educated poor and losing those with the best educations.

Douglas E. Bowers

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